

NELLO PONENTE

LA REGINA



DE LUCA PUBLISHER

ROMA 1955

GUIDO LA REGINA

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MYRTLE TODES GALLERY
HIGHLAND PARK - ILLINOIS

Printed in Italy

ISTITUTO GRAFICO TIBERINO - ROMA

The discussion as between abstract and figurative art that raises such controversy in contemporary Italian painting has not perhaps that urgency and importance that some people would like it to have. It cannot be so considered because to come down on one side or the other, whether affirmatively or negatively, would mean excluding a half of the tradition that Italian painting has created for itself during this first half of the century. Willing to concede, as indeed we are, the quality of a work of art whatever the language in which it may have chosen to speak to us, provided that language is relevant to the problems posed by the period in which it is created, we must however admit that the vitality of these contemporary problems more often than not finds its resolution, and its proper form, in what is no longer abstraction from the very moment when it is seen to be so closely linked to the condition of our time.

Whether because of a greater seriousness in artists with abstract tendencies, or because of their greater liberty, or because they sense the questions of their own age with a deeper immediacy, and above all, without rethoric, yet it does seem that it is much more easy to find amongst the ranks of present-day Italian art a good abstract painting (and we also shall continue to use the conventional phrase), than a similarly good figurative work.

The discussion, therefore, has no reason for its existence on

this basis; and there are others. For instance, one can observe on many sides that present-day art has lost all its national characteristics, that a canvas painted in Italy could just as well have been painted in New York or Paris. However, this is not completely true, because although it is correct to say that life in the modern world (and a work of art cannot be considered as separate from life), has multiplied this interchange, so that it is perfectly easy to know in Rome what is being done in Paris and elsewhere, yet on the other hand it is also true to say that a work of art always remains an individual creation and thus there is ever the possibility of reaching through it to the personality, in all its completeness, of that work's creator.

It is for this reason that within the field of an international appreciation painting like that of Guido La Regina maintains its typical Italian characteristics, is part of an Italian tradition and takes up a line which while over-riding national boundaries, precisely because of the modernness of his conceptions, does nevertheless retain certain particular hallmarks which make its origin and the country from which it springs apparent.

Furthermore, to carry his particular outlook to a level of formal abstraction has meant for La Regina a development of greater stylistic precision, a greater realisation in his knowledge of the possibilities of the right method that has, consequently, carried the artist forward towards an output that is qualitatively higher. A qualitative advance that naturally corresponds to a greater maturation in personality, to an objectivisation of primary motives. The accusation of a vague internationalism fails, therefore, also in the case of this artist, even if it remains true that his experience, which is completely individual, cannot be considered as contained within the limits of his own country, from which, however, he has inherited all his warmth and its particular historical and natural elements.

The origins of abstract art in Italy, notwithstanding that a large

Southern Italian temperament rather than wasting itself on this naturalistic approach, overlaid by a retarded expressionism, with all the scaffolding that such a tardy assimilation brings with it, was able to find itself in a new co-existence of object and form, understood as a creation of form-image.

And it was the beginning of a standpoint open to all suggestions, even the most improbable, because once having started out on a road judged by the well-meaning to be dangerous, and in reality it was the only road possible, La Regina preferred to go full out rather than stop, choosing to be foolish and not prudent. There was no need for anything further because the force, the natural warmth and restlessness of his nature, even more natural in that he was on the search for new means and methods that animated the Italian figurative school of those years, were no longer contained within the objectivisation of the image, freeing them in an unbridled gallop across all the experiences the artist could find within his territory, in a constant search for new facts and fuller appreciation, which would allow one at the end to reach a quiet haven in which to furl sail and ponder in meditation an experience which was finally one's very own; and that this should have had its negative aspects as well as its positive, is of little import.

Cubism and neo-cubism were weapons which were not missing in Guido La Regina's equipment, and he used them carelessly, even with abandon, one might say, just as every Southern Italian dissipates the very things which he has had to earn with such toil, things which they have gained at the expense of their fervid imagination. In fact this wealth is their only possession. And in Guido La Regina there was much such fertility of expression, that could utilise its material with a similar abandon, merely by putting himself in front of a canvas with a brush in his hand, to create forms, those curved and burdened objects, his still-lives with their precarious naturalistic

equilibrium but possessing a solid pictorial structure. It was enough, in fact, to invent, as our artists of the Renaissance were wont to express themselves, to be set free from the tyranny of a tale or the object itself.

The neo-cubist phase was salutary for many in Italy, as it was for the style of Guido La Regina, because it led to an overcoming of a vague expressionism that was rife in certain quarters. Italian Expressionism had indeed its own individual character, recognisable above all in that delightful insight seen in the work of Scipione and Mafai in Rome about 1930, a period that opened up the way for a Roman school and in Turin to the «Group of Six»; nevertheless, the expressionist outlook, perhaps more akin to the Italian temperament than it was diverse the intellectual alchemy of cubism, forced artists to consider form with a freedom that very often became too lax, while at the same time it did not succeed in making them use their imagination. It was precisely from the artists who understood the importance of cubism, at times directly as a counter-balance to expressionism, that there came the capacity to reach a greater and more actual freedom, freedom firstly from the object, from the object-image as understood in its naturalistic sense. And it was in fact this neo-cubism which provided a revival and a deepening of understanding in Italy in the years immediately following the war, allowing the younger generation to take their most decisive step forward in abstract art.

If it is true, as we were saying before, that a live abstract tradition has always existed in Italy almost without a break in continuity from futurism onwards, it is also true to say on the other hand that one is dealing with an experience limited to the avantgarde of Italian painting in the twentieth century, an avantgarde happy in their belief in the succeeding generation that would carry forward the abstract school towards a level of greater richness and more

widespread diffusion, to a point where one could consider it as actually and in relation to the real condition of things the only possible basis of meaningful experience. A neo-cubist period was therefore likewise necessary in Guido La Regina's development, permitting him to more ably manipulate a new outlook, an experience which freed him not so much from the expressionist impetus with which he was born as liberating him from a state of captivity a priori that has hindered his full realisation as a painter. Not that the object is not necessary nor that immanence is no longer valid (and immanence is not the same as the contingency of the object), but that it is essential that this immanence should be discovered at a pictorial level which arises from an inner emotional state and does not derive from a naturalistic stimulus and emotion suffered externally. Thus, the object first seen in its entirety was put through the neo-cubist dismemberment of its parts, through the reduction of its structural elements into essentials and these elements were at times used purely as delineating values.

Nevertheless, in the hands of the painter the skeleton of the composition became enriched, losing its abstract equilibrium, the colour, above all, modifying the original emotion. The object thus lost its natural objectivity but took on an illusionary one, somewhat akin to a surrealist approach. Guido La Regina felt that this overlay was taking a hold of him, turning him away from the concept of pure painting that had formerly been his most important preoccupation. Once again it was necessary to focus on the object as such, transform it or leave it alone. The change followed the line of a greater emphasis on movement, of a more pronounced width and rapidity in the brush strokes, thus abandoning the objective vision for a more coherent synthesis of the image's structure. It was a move towards a geometry of form, holding on however to those binding elements typical to expressionism. He had reached, in fact, a stage

at which he could gather in and bring to flower all that had previously been developing within. And the painter, as he confesses, thought that he had failed. The dynamic transformation of the object up to a given point was no longer, even then, sufficiently like the structure which the painter wished to impose on it. He thought, therefore, that the pictorial emotion should have been even more pure, that is should have arisen from a less articulated emphasis on the movement of forms, but from their greater geometric precision, from a more fully set-out field. Neo-cubism in truth had been pushed to its farthest limit and in a certain sense back again and was held within a neoplastic nexus. All which, naturally, did not correspond fully to the temperament of the painter, nor did he have a sufficiently Franciscan spirit to suffer for long the habit of a rigidly schematised form, yet the use made of colour, that certainly had nothing to do with neo-plasticism because of its tonal origin, the greater liberty in comprehending geometric design, allowed La Regina to safely overcome such obstacles and come out with a most rewarding experience. The ships, the sloops, and subsequent landscapes, implied a return to the object, but with a more precise pictorial understanding of the functionalism of its structure. Garibaldo Marussi wrote in 1952 in the preface to an exhibition of La Regina's work: «Of objects only those remain which we may call the component parts, that is those essential lines which bring out the rhythm. The scansion of these lines, of these nets and oblique forms which transform themselves into curves, is modulated with harmonic delicacy, bringing out therefrom an imaginative whole. Colour here has its predominant part to play, disciplined and finished as it is in its tonal variations. At times it is opaque and divides the canvas as if it would capture some phantastic shape. Thus is imagination liberated. Thus is the pull of the mind's invention made more live and vital».

Freeing himself from experimental super-structures, La Regina

has continued on his way acquiring an equilibrium between his own temperament and the modernity of that vision which he senses as a necessity, because in particular Guido La Regina's standpoint as a painter, to be consistent with that relationship between man and nature that the painter had premissed a priori, has had to arrive at an interpretation of reality which was more freely imaginative, turning, in a sense, to a sensibility of a post-impressionist nature, in as far as colour is concerned, and to a more articulated projection of forms on the canvas; turning, that is, to an expressionism re-attained through other methods, and with a different emotional potentiality which could not have been reached but for the preceding travail. It is evident that all the previous experience, even if it was at variance with what the painter had intended to do, and had achieved, was only a preparation. The same use of a composition based upon neo-plasticism, the subsequent search for the structural values of the component parts in an object, were formerly used to control the emotional response, then to give it a new discipline in which it was finally possible to find a full liberty of feeling, a liberty that did not permit of any evasion through casual treatment, but which maintained his concern with a constant relationship with form itself, while the same form held firm its own relationship to nature. It is important, in fact, for an understanding of the final stage in Guido La Regina's work to establish the necessity of this contact which the artist makes with the natural world within himself. It is a contact that is established from the interior, growing out of personality, and it is not concerned, therefore, with objective reproduction of natural objects, but it does grip hold of their élan and potentiality, breaking them down from subject into essentials, following the well-learned impressionist formula; that is, it transforms these objects in accordance with the particular sensibility of that particular moment in time and in accordance with the given attitude of the

mind. And these objects, rather than being reproduced, as was formerly the case, in the external relationship, are now reconstructed as if from within. This could seem to be a new naturalism, but in reality it is not so; as on the other hand it is not either abstraction, in the more precise use of that term, in as much as La Regina does not copy a naturalistic world, nor yet is he indifferent to that same world. Nature, a landscape, even the variations in the light during the hours of the day, are caught up in the play of the imagination; drained of their burdensome objective content, acquiring a new meaning, a new reality that is no longer that of the external relationships between things but is exclusively that of painting. However, the artist could not reach this high liberty in front of his subject, if it were not impregnated with his emotional response. And thus, when it had become possible to filter every external stimulus, every contact with the surrounding world, through a mental concept of his own particular style, the product by now of a long experience and refinement in the modes of expressing himself, it was then likewise possible to reach a synthesis between mental and emotional construction. In this manner the naturalistic intuition of things becomes imaginatively formulated, while, on the other side, the form with which it is clothed is not preponderant or created a priori, but is the product of this synthesis.

The history of Guido La Regina's painting is all in this search for an equilibrium, an equilibrium that had to make some compromise between a temperament naturally capable of strong emotions and an acute sensibility and participation in the problems of life in the modern world. Aware of his historical «condition», the artist without question would have used to express himself those means that are natural to modern painting and he had faith in these that they would make concrete his individual and changing attitudes of mind. Concerned that he should not have to bear limitations and

impositions from without, but willing to submit to a discipline imposed from within, aware that art cannot be arbitrary nor realised according to a formula, La Regina having finally reached this equilibrium has found his most happy expression; without, however, any lessening of purpose, without any abandoning of his faith in that submission to life that he has already accepted, but with a constant spirit of adventure. And his sensibility is open to all that may affect it and to all manners of further adventure.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Guido La Regina born at Naples, 13th February 1909.

He started showing first in 1924 at the Biennale of Decorative Arts at Monza in Italy, which has since become the Triennale of Milan.

He graduated in 1931 at the Accademia di Belle Arti, Naples.

In 1946 he formed the Sindacato Nazionale delle Belle Arti (National Society of Fine Arts) and held the post of Secretary for a number of years.

As from 1945 he lived and worked in Rome at the Villa Massimo, well-known group of studios where he has developed his present style of « non-objective » painting.

Personal Exhibitions. — 1933, Naples, Circolo della Stampa; 1944, Abbazia (Fiume), Sale di Villa Alma; 1950, Rome, Galleria di Roma; 1951, Rome, Vetrina di Chiurazzi; 1952, Milan, Galleria del Naviglio; 1952, Florence, Galleria di « Numero »; 1952, Venice, Galleria del Cavallino; 1953, Milan, Galleria del Naviglio; 1954, Venice, Galleria del Cavallino; 1955, Rome, Galleria delle Carrozze.

Collective Exhibitions. — Invited to all the most important Italian Exhibitions and at the Biennale of Venice.

Exhibitions abroad. — 1954 at the Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, U.S.A.; 1955, Todes Gallery, Highland Park-Illinois, U.S.A.

Publications. — « Xilografie di Guido La Regina », Cardan Ed., Naples, 1932; « Trenta xilografie di Guido La Regina », Costabile Ed., Naples, 1936; « Dieci Linoleum a colori - Introduction by R. Orlando », De Luca Ed., Rome, 1951; « Guido La Regina » - by R. Orlando, De Luca Ed., Rome, 1952.

Stage designs. — « Giannina e Bernardone » by Scarlatti - S. Carlo Theatre, Naples, 1934; « Madonna e Oretta » by G. Forzano - Compagnia del Piccolo Teatro di Napoli (Sala Tarsia), 1934.

Holy Art. — Catino (big mosaico) of the Church of Abbazia (Fiume), 1934; Pala of S. Benedetto at the Main Church of Abbazia (Fiume), 1944; Pala of S. Rita at the Main Church of Abbazia (Fiume), 1945.

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 V. PROFUMI: *La scultura e il bianco e nero alla Mostra di Napoli*. (« Popolo di Roma », Roma, 22 novembre 1931).
 B. TESTA: *Il bianco e nero alla mostra d'Arte a Napoli*. (« Roma della Domenica », 9 dicembre 1931).
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 F. T.: *Mostra personale di Guido La Regina al Circolo della Stampa*. (« Corriere di Napoli », Napoli, 24 aprile 1933).
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PLATES



COMPOSITION, 1951 - Canvas-oil, cm. 60 × 120



FISHING BOAT AT CHIOGGIA, 1951 - Oil on paper, cm. 70 X 100



COMPOSITION, 1951 - Canvas-oil, cm. 45 × 62



COMPOSITION, 1952 - Canvas-oil, cm. 60 X 110

De Luca Collection - Rome



NETS AT S. FRUTTUOSO, 1952 - Canvas-oil, cm. 60 X 100

De Luca Collection - Rome



ACROPOLIS 1952 - Canvas-oil, cm. 80 X 160



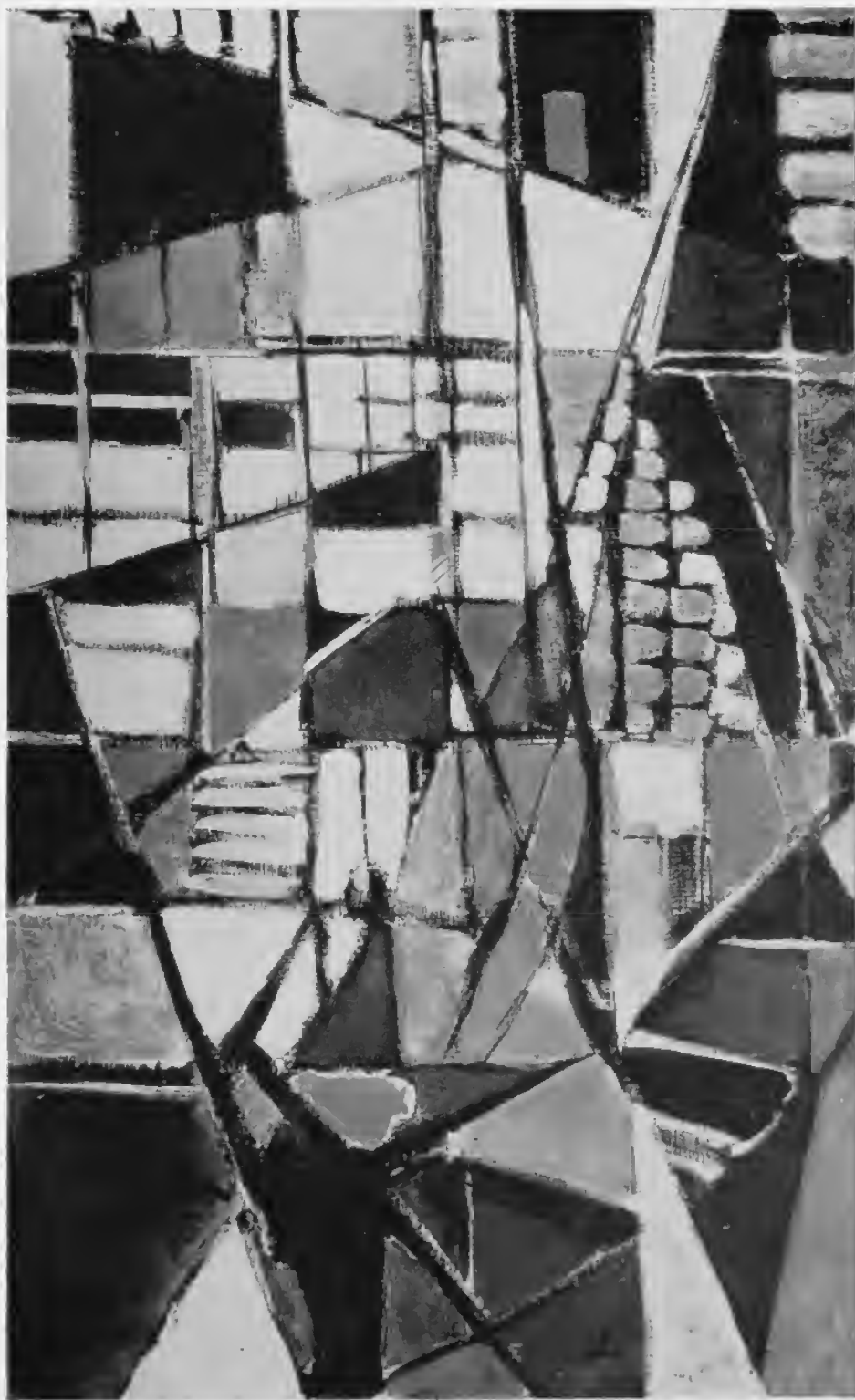
FISHERMAN'S HOUSE, 1952 - Canvas-oil, cm. 40 X 60



MAIN STREET IN THE CITY, 1954 - Tempera on paper. cm. 30 × 60



DOCK-YARD, 1952-53 - Canvas-oil, cm, 60 × 80



FISHING BOAT IN THE BAY OF PONZA, 1953 - Canvas-oil, cm. 60 X 100

Rizzo Collection - New York



HOUSES OF POSITANO, 1953 - Canvas-oil, cm. 65 X 80

Tosi Collection - Milan



HOUSES AMONGST TREES. 1953 - Silk screen, cm. 67 X 140



POSITANO IN THE EVENING, 1953 - Silk Screen, cm. 60 X 140



MODERN TOWN, 1955 - Canvas-oil, cm. 60 X 120



FISHING BOAT IN THE BAY, 1953 - Silk screen,
cm. 60 × 140



THE HARBOUR, 1954 - Silk screen, cm. 40 X 25



TOWN BATHED IN SUNSHINE, 1954 - Canvas-oil, cm. 80 X 100



MOON ON PINWOOD. 1955 - Canvas-oil, cm. 60 X 120



COLOUR OF THE COAST AT AMALFI, 1955 - Canvas-oil, cm. 65 X 85

Private Collection - Rome



HOUSES AND TREES, 1955 - Canvas-oil, cm. 60 X 120



CAPRI, MARINA PICCOLA, 1955 - Canvas-oil, cm. 60 X 110

